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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [UNSC](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: NCP OPEN TO ARBITRATION ON ABYEI

¶1. (SBU) During a meeting with CDA Fernandez January 31, NCP strategist and Director of the Strategic Studies Institute Dr. Sayed Al-Khateeb said the NCP may be open to arbitration on Abyei. However, he said the NCP may not be open to a high-level meeting in Washington to inaugurate an Abyei initiative because "a visit to Washington is no longer viewed as a carrot." However, Al-Khateeb warned that if the Abyei issue is not solved and the South secedes, "the Abyei quagmire will suck both sides back into war." Al-Khateeb said that in recent political executive committee meetings with the SPLM there has been no progress on the thorny Abyei issue. "Sooner or later Abyei must go to arbitration, and you are the godfather of this protocol," observed Al-Khateeb but warning that such arbitration will require real engagement and neutrality.

¶2. (SBU) On the upcoming visit of Special Envoy Richard Williamson, Al-Khateeb warned that the envoy should come prepared to listen in depth to both parties and must not come with a pre-conceived plan. "We are offended when diplomats here and visitors act like Sudan is a protectorate," he said.

¶3. (SBU) Proposed AEC chair - former UK Ambassador to Egypt and Arabist Derek Plumley - may not be accepted by the NCP, according to Al-Khateeb. Al-Khateeb said he told the President that Plumley is not the only candidate. He noted that much will depend on what the Presidency wants to do with the AEC. If the Presidency wants a new formulation of observers and a chair from a different country than Norway, an entirely new decree will be required. Al-Khateeb pointed out that it would have been much easier if Norway had simply retained the chair and proposed a replacement for former AEC chair Tom Vraalsen. He also noted ominously that UK candidate Plumley will be viewed through the prism of broader UK-Sudan relations. However, Al-Khateeb said that within the narrow confines of the AEC, the NCP viewed UK and US contributions to the commission quite positively, while there had been problems with the Italians and the Dutch. "And the Kenyans never got into the game."

¶4. (SBU) Al-Khateeb claimed the NCP does want elections, but that other parties don't want elections - and the SPLM wants to move directly to the referendum. "They want things to be so chaotic that the NCP will be forced to postpone elections" and they won't have to take the blame. Perhaps revealing the true inclinations of his own party, however, Al-Khateeb said that a delay in the election might not mean a delay in the referendum.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Al-Khateeb practically invited SE Williamson to engage on Abyei, which is an opportunity not to be missed, if done with the depth and attention required of this complex issue. It is clear that the thinking half of the NCP recognizes that this issue must be solved somehow. However, as we have pointed out many times, the U.S. must offer something credible - in terms of both incentives and consequences - in order to be able to engage with the Sudanese. And while some NCP officials may welcome outside arbitration on

Abyei, the standard party line is still that the negotiations between the SPLM and NCP on this issue have not been exhausted and "foreign mediation" will only be called for, "when the time is right," which may be too late.

FERNANDEZ